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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a synopsis of issues and recommendations regarding school reform, based on discussions held at the 1990 Forum on Emerging Trends in Special Education and Implications for Training Personnel. The paper calls for schools to adopt a collaborative model that infuses special education policies and practices into general education. The paper argues that the spirit of Public Law 94-142 and federal regulations guiding disbursement of discretionary funds can be interpreted as an encouragement to develop a model that includes special and general education students in the same design. Three major issues requiring consideration in establishing this inclusionary model are graduation requirements, transition, and content and curriculum. Graduation requirements need to become more congruent with general education, offering some type of certificate that has value as a medium of exchange in the world of work or higher education. The transition process needs to be incorporated, as early as seventh grade, into programs for children with disabilities. A working relationship between special and general education is needed to develop such educational delivery methods as cooperative learning and content-focused curriculum. (JDD)

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Is It A New View?: Catching Up With 94-142

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Special Education and school reform was a major topic which was addressed at the 1990 Forum on Emerging Trends in Special Education. This paper provides a synopsis of issues discussed and the recommendations made regarding those topics.

Policy recommendations for the field and subsequent recommendations for awarding grants are designed to encourage development of projects that increase general and special education collaboration. Such projects are needed for schools to serve a full range of students in a collaborative model by infusing special education policies and practices into general education. It is imperative that these projects also be designed to include teaching staff, principals, school district administrators, school board members, and teacher trainers at the preservice and in-service levels.

Main Issues and Solutions

In order for a collaborative/infusionary model to be effected successfully, two basic issues need to be dealt with: (a) Does a general education-special education collaborative focus require alteration in the regulations that determine the worthiness of a United States Department of Education (USDE) application for discretionary funds? and (b) Does this view require any changes in P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Act and its amendments? Heretofore, the collaborative model called for the special educator to act as a liaison to interpret and facilitate meeting the needs of handicapped students in the least restrictive environment. Often the desired setting was the "mainstream", thus working with general educators has and will continue to be an important special education function. Since facilitating students' successes in the least restrictive environment, including the mainstream, is integral to the special educators' mission, collaboration with general education should receive more formal acknowledgement.

The three operative words that have been used in this model are normalization, integration and mainstreaming. These descriptors are not separate in the parent handbook put out by TAPP (Technical Assistance for Parent Programs; Biklen, Ferguson, & Ford, 1989). They are incorporated in the following statement, "Taken at face value, P.L. 94-142 expresses a strong preference for integration; that is, placement in the "least restrictive" or "most normal" educational setting." (p. 7)

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Considering the recent research on the changing needs of our school children as well as our society, diversity of need is the norm (Baca, 1984). This inclusionary model (Biklen et al., 1989), designed to serve special education students in the regular classroom, may be the best approach toward delivering educational services not only to students with specific disabilities but for all students. All teachers, staff, site principals, district administrators, and school board members must be aware of and knowledgeable about the best practices for delivery of services to the diverse need of today's school children. With this interpretation there is no need to ask the local education agencies (LEA) to waive the rights of handicapped students for specialized services in order to put in place a full scaled mainstreaming model. The monitoring of the specific needs of the handicapped student will still be intact.

The federal regulations that guide the disbursement of discretionary funds in the Department of Personnel Preparation specifically states, under B. Criterion 2- Capacity of the Instruction,

> "The quality of the practicum training setting, including evidence that they are sufficiently available, apply state-of-the-art services, and model teaching practices, materials and technology, provide adequate supervision to trainees, and offer opportunities for trainees to teach and foster interaction between students with handicaps and their non-handicapped peers".

These words spell out the spirit of the law and can be interpreted as an encouragement to develop a model that includes special and general education students in the same design.

Obstacles to Obtaining the Ideal

In establishing this inclusionary model many issues need to be resolved. The three major issues to consider are (a) graduation requirements, (b) transition, and (c) content and curriculum. The regular education system can in part be determined by its distribution of benefits (Green, Ericson, & Seidman, 1980). The rewards are medium of exchange. A diploma, transcripts, and licenses are affidavits that verify a certain level of attainment and are negotiable for acceptance in schools of higher education and the world of work. The reward after completing twelve years of schooling in special education often results in a Certificate of Attendance which has little or no value as a medium of exchange. Therefore, graduation requirements as well as negotiable outcomes need to become more congruent with general education in this inclusionary model.

Transition which is a next step from graduation has been an issue in the reauthorization of EHA Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-457) during the 101st Congress. Testimony indicates the importance of incorporating transition into the school plan for

handicapped children as early as seventh grade (Rusch, 1990). This, as well as other promising practices, demand that the schools and the transition process be integrated. On the issue of curriculum and content, research indicates that in cooperative learning (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wells, 1981) and in content focused curriculum (Bloom, 1988), more learning takes place than with transitional methods of delivery of educational services. This research, coupled with the long history of successful methods and materials used in special education, especially those of classroom management, can be the grounds on which to design and develop a better delivery of educational services for all. Therefore, it is necessary that a working relationship between special and general education be developed in which content and curriculum is a central focus.

In order to pursue best practices it is not necessary to alter P.L. 94-142 nor is there need to alter the regulations that govern the disbursements of discretionary funds from the Department of Personnel Preparation. An inclusionary collaborative model, including newest research on best practices, can be a focus for the grant applicants. Projects that deal with collaboration between special and general education designed to infuse special education policies and practices into general education need to be encouraged. These projects cannot only concern themselves with teacher training but need to include staff, site principals, school administrators, and school board members.

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